

Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division” (Luke 12:51).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Last week, presidential candidate Joe Biden told a crowd at the Iowa State Fair,

“We choose unity over division. We choose science over fiction.

We choose truth over *facts*.”

The crowd roared in agreement, for the world delights to *choose for itself* what is true... regardless of facts!

It’s a sign of the times.

Gender is now fluid...

WE now choose whether we are male, female, or none of the above.

States across the nation are now using “gender-neutral” birth certificates so that no sex is declared, regardless of the external anatomy.

In fact, parents in New York City and other states may actually change their children’s gender on their birth certificates until they reach age 18.

It's
a sign of the times.

Recently,
the lesbian archbishopess of the Lutheran church in Sweden has ordered the
removal of all crosses from their sanctuaries so as not to offend the Muslims.

Metropolitan
Kallistos Ware of the Eastern Orthodox church openly supports "homosexual
marriage."

And
closer to home, Concordia Portland, an LCMS University, has a "Gender and
Sexuality Resource Center" that recently promoted LGBTQ History Month,
"acknowledging the
complexity of gay, lesbian, trans, queer, questioning, and ally, etc.
identities."

At Concordia St.
Paul, you can join the "PEACE Club" (People Encouraging Acceptance Connection
and Equality) which is "dedicated to creating an inclusive place for all
students, particularly members of the LGBTQI community."

These
are all just signs of the times.

And
what times are these?

These are, of course, the Last times -

the Last Days in
which we find not only wars and rumors of war, famine, and disaster of every
kind,

but
also the whole-sale rejection of absolute truth.

The result has been

anger, hostility, social unrest, depression, drug addiction, and despair such as we have never seen.

But you
know what? You better not say anything –

not unless you want
to be labeled an “intolerant hateful homophobic racist bigot...” or worse.

No, if
you want to have peace in this world,

you’d better just
keep quiet and keep your little Bible-thumpin’ views to yourself... Or not...

For the
fact is, there are no surprises here, right?

As I’ve said, these are all just “signs of the times” –

signs of ALL time,
in fact, since Adam and Eve first bit into that promise that we could determine
what was true for ourselves.

These
are the signs of a world in chaos, in misery and confusion, divorced from God
and the good order He provided,

destined for death and eternal condemnation.

In
other words, these are the signs of sin...

the
very sin that Jesus came to save us from.

Jesus
said, “I came to cast fire on the earth” (Luke 12:49), that is,

to bring this rot and ruin to an end!

And He
did -

He brought the fiery
wrath of God's judgement down from heaven, not upon US as we deserved, but
upon
Himself in our place.

As He
promised in our text, "I have a baptism to be baptized with" -

a refining fire, if you will -

a death on the cross
that He anguished over until it was accomplished. (Luke 12:50)

But now
it IS accomplished. It IS finished.

In Christ crucified
and risen, all humanity has been set free from the bonds of sin and death,
free
from Satan's lie that we can *choose* the truth for ourselves.

For we *have*
the truth spelled out for us plainly in God's Word.

As a new creation
through our Baptism into Christ's fiery death and glorious resurrection, we
don't have to go the way of rack and ruin anymore.

As those born anew
of the Spirit, we no longer set our minds on the things of the flesh, but on
the things of the Spirit who sets us free to live by the Truth and to follow in
the Way that leads to eternal life.

The
only problem is, not everyone wants this.

Many are still clinging to the devil's lies.

They

have been duped into thinking that most people, especially themselves, are basically good, and that they can determine the best way for themselves *and* their neighbor to live in this world.

They treasure the

ability to choose what is true for themselves, even to the extent of choosing “truth over facts.”

They are convinced

we can make this world a better place and redeem ourselves if only we nod along, get along, and work together.

Of

course, anybody who *doesn't* agree with their version of the truth is evil and must be put down and eliminated.

Again,

no surprises here, right?

After all, in

practically the same breath that Jesus points to His impending sacrifice in today's Gospel reading,

He

tells us this very sacrifice will cause great division.

“You

think my coming will bring peace to this world? Think again!

There will not be peace in this world, but rather division –

division between

father and son, daughter and mother, three against two, two against three –

division between

those who order their lives in accordance with God's Word and those who insist on choosing their own truth;

division between

those who believe they are sinners and live from Christ's forgiveness, and those who do not...

And you
know what? This division is going to be ugly -

always has been, always will be.

Jesus made it clear,
"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:19).

The
problem is, very few, if any of us, have ever had to deal with persecution the likes of which is beginning to unfold around us.

We're entering into a
new era - the Last Days when the Western world is declaring war against the church.

It's
still subtle - we don't have lions and gladiators just yet...

But the opposition is ramping up, and it is getting serious.

Just
this past week, a couple of high-profile evangelicals have renounced their faith, NOT because they were ignorant of the basic tenets of Christianity,

but because of the adversity associated with upholding those tenets!

According to an
article by David French, there is a lack of "pure moral courage and resolve to live [by] faith in the face of cultural headwinds."

In
other words, people just aren't prepared to face what's coming, and they'd rather leave the church, or at the very least, seek cover and remain silent,

than push back against the world, the devil, and his lies.

And
that's not good...

For
really, there is only one task to which the Church - the Christian - YOU and ME
- have been called in these Last Days -

only one thing entrusted to our care:

We
are to uphold the Word of Truth.

In
Revelation, Jesus tells us, "I am coming soon.

Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown"
(Rev 3:11).

Hold
fast to the Truth, the Word of God, the faithful testimony that we SHARE with
Jesus for the life of the world.

For we are the very means by which Jesus continues His work
of salvation -

the very means by
which He shows people the sign of the times, the peril and chaos that brings
such misery,

that they might turn
from their sin and have peace and a well-ordered life in relationship with God
and with one another.

In
fact, it is this faithful stance on the Word of Truth alone that can rescue
people from their suffering -

to do anything less is to abandon them to sin, death, and
hell.

Of
course, the devil and the world do NOT want the Truth,
and so they will despise you.

When
you reject their idols and their error, they will view it as an attack on their
very being, and they will fight back.

They will ridicule you and condemn you.

They
will try to hurt you.

And a day is coming
when they may even imprison you or kill you.

Already
we have seen vicious attacks against bakers, photographers, florists, and
various professionals and business owners who have taken their stand on the
truth.

Who knows what might
happen after I post this sermon on our website or send it out by email...

After the Clarion Ledger published a smear several weeks ago that identified
Christ Lutheran with some unpopular political views,

how long before
picketers start showing up on Sunday mornings to harass us or film us going in
and out of church,

hoping to intimidate
us for our views on gender, marriage, homosexuality, abortion, evolution... the
Truth? (Tx Larry Bean, Gottesdienst, 8/14/19).

These
tactics are already being employed in some places,
and they can cost you
your job, your reputation, your credibility...

perhaps
even your life...

Are
you ready?

The
answer is, yes, of course you are!

For you are people of faith.

You
live by faith, not by fear.

Like that
magnificent cloud of witnesses who have gone before us,

you have heard the Word of Promise,

and
you know you're in Good Hands.

What's
more, you have seen the "Signs of the Times" -

not just the sign of
sin and death consuming this world, but the Sign of Jonah-

the
sign for ALL time -

the sign of Christ
crucified and risen for your victory over sin, death, and hell.

Through
the sign of your Baptism, you have already the promise of His victory.

Through the sign of
Christ's body and blood, you now have Christ in you, the author and perfecter
of our faith,

who
for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross,

despising the shame,
that He might claim the victory over sin and save the world.

And
now, participating *with* Jesus in this work He continues to do,

you head into the
jaws of an ugly, angry world, holding fast the Word of truth,

so that even if you
appear to be defeated, the victory is being won and God's kingdom comes!

For to take the
field against the devil and die a martyr's death is NOT to take the field and
lose, as Jesus' own death on the cross testifies,

but
to take the field and win!

So do
not be afraid.

Rather, consider the
Words Jesus speaks in the verses just before our reading today: Blessed are
those who hear the Word of God and keep it (Luke 11:28).

Do not fear those
who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. (Luke
12:4).

For everyone who
acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the
angels of God (Luke 12:8).

Fear
not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the
kingdom (Luke 12:32).

Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning (Luke 12:35),

for “no one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light (v33).

Of course, if you have feared, fallen, or failed in the task entrusted to you, by all means, repent!

Repent, and rejoice! For yours is the victory in Christ.

The signs are all there:

the Word of forgiveness, the water of life, the Body and Blood of your risen Savior,

ALL for you.

So don't be afraid, but take your place in the fight AND at the feast, now and forever.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon text: Luke 12:49-56